

**NEWS RELEASE** 

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TWO GROUPS RECEIVE ROBINSON AWARD

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – At its meeting in Frankfort today, the Kentucky Board of Education presented the annual Dr. Samuel Robinson Award to co-winners – Playhouse in the Park/Murray Calloway County Community Theater and the Partnership Institute for Math and Science Education Reform (PIMSER) at the University of Kentucky.

Since 2004, the Dr. Samuel Robinson Award has been conferred on an individual or group in Kentucky for outstanding leadership, commitment and service in promoting equity and opportunity to learn at high levels for all Kentucky students.

Playhouse in the Park/Murray Calloway County Community Theater was singled out for its involvement with the Penguin Project, an inclusive, educational theatrical experience where children with special needs fill the lead roles in a production with the support of peer mentors. The Penguin Project was originally developed by Dr. Andy Morgan, a pediatrician in Peoria, Illinois, who selected Murray's Playhouse as a replication site. The Playhouse is the only theater in Kentucky, and one of seven in the United States, involved in the project.

In nominating the Playhouse in the Park, Murray Elementary School Principal Denise Whitaker wrote that the Playhouse "is leading the way to a more inclusive community that offers equitable access to all its participants." She went on to note that the community is very supportive and the schools encourage their students to participate in the Penguin Project. This year more than 50 students, ages 10 to 21 from eight different schools, participated as artists and mentors. Additionally, many adults, including several teachers, volunteered to direct, paint and costume for the production.

Whitaker said production has opened community members' eyes to how much children with special needs can do and also helped boost student confidence.

"A teacher of one of the artists remarked that she didn't realize how much her student could do. Watching him on stage helped her see him in a whole new way. She also remarked that his confidence in class, and his relationships with peers had grown," Whitaker said.

(more)

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PIMSER was nominated for the Robinson Award by Tim Schneider, an interim Secondary Teaching and Learning Lead Teacher in the Campbell County public schools. Schneider described PIMSER as his "educational leadership Think Tank" that he uses frequently. "PIMSER is 'that' place where I can go to see and experience the current research put into practice The research-based initiatives shared by experienced, well qualified staff at the institute are phenomenal!"

Sara M. Poeppelman, chair of the Lewis County High School Science Department, agreed with Schneider's assessment of PIMSER. "Through their outreach programs and offerings for teachers who take these experiences back to enhance their student learning experiences, PIMSER has undoubtedly positively impacted thousands of young Kentuckians' learning and understanding of mathematics and science and engineering concepts." she said.

Dr. Samuel Robinson, for whom the award is named, is a former educator, who served on the Kentucky Board of Education from 1991 to 2004, and is known for being a racial and social justice advocate and for promoting the difference education can make in the lives of all students.

## Past Recipients of the Dr. Samuel Robinson Award

**2004** (joint recipients) Sen. Gerald A. Neal of Louisville and the One Community, One Voice Achievement and Closing the Gap Community Committee of Fayette County

2005 Robert Smotherman, superintendent of the Bardstown Independent school district

**2006** (joint recipients) Marlene Helm, Ed.D., former interim dean of the Eastern Kentucky University College of Education and Rep. Frank Rasche of Paducah

2007 Kathy Reed, member of the Bardstown Independent School Board

2008 Laura McGrail, lead school psychologist for the Henderson County school district

**2009** (joint recipients) Arriba Ninos (Upward Children) program in Shelbyville and the First Baptist Church Bracktown in Fayette County

2010 Helen Mountjoy, former secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

2011 Robert Sexton, former executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence (posthumous)

**2012** (joint recipients) Gregory Ross, Ed.D., former principal of McNabb Elementary, Paducah Independent school district, and Kern Alexander, Ed.D., former president of Murry State University and Western Kentucky University

**2013** (joint recipients) The Fayette Co. Equity Council and Dr. Ronnie Nolan, director of the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC)

**2014** (joint recipients) Cindy Heine, retired associate executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, and Dr. Henry Webb, superintendent of Floyd County Schools

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